

Sermon Topic: **Consider How You Have Fared** by Pr Wendy Chiang-Cheong

Sermon Text: **Haggai 1:1-12, Matthew 7:21-27**

Big Idea: When God's alarm wakes us to re-order our priorities, don't sleep through it.

1. Introduction

- The function of an alarm clock – wakes us up, sometimes back to reality; pulls us out of comfort zone, to prepare us to get to work
- God has alarm clocks in the Bible – God's prophets sounded alarm and woke people of God from their slumber, e.g. Haggai whose words were loud and urgent, despite brevity

2. Prior to Haggai's Entry

God's people:

- a. Were **defiant** at the voice of God. Allegiance of their hearts & moral compass had shifted – tested God's patience
- b. Were **disciplined** by decree of God
 - i. God purposed Nebuchadnezzar to humble the rebellious & they were in exile in Babylon for 70 years
 - Those who defy God all the way will die by the sword of the enemy
- c. Were **delivered** as promised by God
 - i. God promised to bring the obedient home
 - Those who drop their rebellion will return home to rebuild the temple and the land

➔ **God will always wake up His people when their hearts go wrong. He shakes them up – it's not always comfortable, but it's always profound and good.**

3. Time's Up, Time to Return

When 70 years of captivity ended, they RETURNED to homeland with resources provided, REBUILT the foundation of temple, but RETREATED from completion of work.

- Rebuilt the temple foundation in second year of return, BUT
- Retreated because of opposition, fear & intimidation. Their zeal was quenched.
- Postponed/paused work for 15 years

“Having no heart for the work of God, they easily interpreted the obstacles as divine hints that they were not to engage in it and turned to the greedy advancement of their own private affairs.”
– T.V Moore

➔ **God will always wake up His people when their hearts go wrong.**

Haggai enters and asks:

- Why do you say IT IS NOT YET TIME to build My house? (1:2)
- Why have you NO CONCERN for My house in ruins?
- Why do you CARE MORE FOR YOUR OWN HOUSE? (1:4) – use what I have provided for My temple for your own houses?

In the Bible, God asks questions to sieve out the intentions of the heart.

4. What Happened to My House?

Back in the Old Testament, the temple was:

- Not a local community center where social activities happen
- Central to the worship of God and the study of His law
- A sacred place of encounter – where God's presence, power and provision is made known

Snoozing the rebuilding of the temple was a huge statement: GOD DOESN'T MATTER.

Haggai's message

+ Pay attention to the condition of your heart:

- The reason is not one of time or resources but priority. Misplaced priority indicated the people had returned to the land but not to God.

+ Pay attention to the consequences of your ways:

- The result is one of frustration and discontentment. God cut a hole in their pocket, i.e. His provision for them. The God who provides is also capable of withholding. The God who blesses is also capable of cursing. He is not obligated to bless those who neglect Him.
- God shook them out of their complacency & comfort.

+ Pay attention to the completion of My House:

- The reaction to Haggai is one of obedience. They immediately returned to God and gave priority to His temple, rebuilding it in 4 months. Their external action indicated their repentance and internal condition of their heart.

Message for our time

5. We Need No Temple Today Because Jesus is the New Temple

- Christ is the new place where followers meet and worship God (Matt 12:6)
- We are living stones, Christ is foundation and cornerstone (1 Pet 2:5):
 - Our job description – to declare His praise, truth, love and light
 - Christ's job description – to reveal God's law and the beauty of God's kingdom, to teach us way of salvation

6. Are We Listening These Days?

- Consider how you have fared:
 - Is God at the centre and circumference of our thoughts and actions in every season of our life?
 - Is Christ reigning over all of our home-making, child-raising, studies, business, retirement?
 - Are we listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in Christian living as Christ's followers and disciples?
- Are we putting Christ in the centre of all we do? It's more than just church attendance. Returning to God involves turning our hearts to God in obedience, being in tune/step with God, re-ordering priorities.

- Easy to say, BUT
 - Not so easy to seek Him through bible reading, through regular praying, through giving, through serving, through accountability
- Paying attention to God: is it too much hassle? Too much adjustment? Too inconvenient?
- God will always wake us up when our hearts go wrong. Do we pay attention or do we delay our action?**
- God's wake-up call to pay attention to Him comes from a place of His love for us. The more we disregard God, the more we move to a place of godlessness; we move away from His divine protection and provision, putting ourselves in place of danger and lack.
- Love is the reason why God tells us to pay attention so that at the end of the day, He will say "I know you ... because you have been paying attention and doing what I have been telling you." God's love for us demands that He shakes us out of procrastination.
- Personal testimony of God's sounding the alarm through health issues in last few months, leading to blaming God and questioning His love. God's shaking up to pay attention to Him, to pray, to obey, to press in to Him ... God's conviction brought repentance for heart to turn back to God, obey and trust Him.
- Beyond the individual level, the church also has to pay attention to God – to love Him, to pray, to hunger after Him, and do as He has commanded, to turn around and put Him at the centre.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Ezra 5:1-17. There was a 15-year delay in rebuilding the temple. In your life, what has taken many years to do right? How do you explain the delay you experienced?
2. According to Haggai 1, what priority problems did the Jews have in Haggai's day?
3. What did God have to say about dealing with inappropriate priorities and how did the Jews respond to Haggai's message (1:3-15)?
4. What is God saying to you about your priorities in light of what you have learnt? What will you do differently after this lesson?
5. Do you think our cell life should be a prioritised or peripheral matter?